

**A DAY OF HONOUR?****PART ONE OF FIVE**

# Time to honour a national hero

**Sir John A. Macdonald built this nation and was its greatest prime minister, says former PM JOHN TURNER. He deserves the recognition Americans give their most notable leaders**

There are many who feel that Jan. 11 should be a national holiday, for on Jan. 11, in the year 1815, in Glasgow, Scotland, John Alexander Macdonald was born. In few other countries would a national hero be so neglected. In comparing Macdonald to Washington it is probably safe to say that Sir John played a greater role in forging the Canadian nation state than Washington did in determining the nature of his United States. In addition, Macdonald was the more interesting personality. The irony is that the interesting human aspects of Macdonald's personality have been allowed to obscure the true greatness of the man.

Britain will never forget her Cromwell, her Pitt and her Disraeli. The hero whose name we add to our list of immortals, John Alexander Macdonald, had much of the force of an Oliver Cromwell, some of the compacting and conciliating tact of a William Pitt, the sagacity of a William Gladstone, and some of the shrewdness of a Benjamin Disraeli. To read the biography of John Alexander Macdonald is, essentially, to read a "new world biography."

His was a great life span. His official life reached back to 1844; think of that. Lord Palmerston was still premier of England when Sir John was an active leader in Canada. When Louis Napoleon was still emperor of the French, when John Tyler was president of the United States, when Bismarck was an obscure country squire, when Lincoln was unheard of, and when Theodore Roosevelt was yet unborn, Sir John Macdonald was well into his life task.

But our wonder grows when we reflect that that career was continued through 47 years of parliamentary life. He was the leader of his party for 36 years; he was a Minister of the Crown for 35 years; he was premier of this Dominion for more than 25 years.

The public life of the average American statesman is very

short; Lincoln was before the public but nine years; McKinley was in national prominence but 13 years, Cleveland, 15 years; Sir John Macdonald, 47 years. In those early days he did Canada great service.

I thought I'd place a quote on the record from Laurier's speech in Parliament upon the death of Macdonald: "The place of Sir John A. Macdonald in this country was so large and so absorbing that it is almost impossible to conceive that the politics of this country - the fate of this country - will continue without him. His loss overwhelms us. For my part, I say, with all truth, his loss overwhelms me, and that it also overwhelms this Parliament, as if indeed one of the institutions of the land had given way. Sir John A. Macdonald now belongs to the ages, and it can be said with certainty that the career which has just been closed is one of the most remarkable careers of this century. . .

"As to his statesmanship, it is written in the history of Canada. It may be said without any exaggeration whatever, that the life of Sir John Macdonald, from the time he entered Parliament, is the history of Canada." (Laurier, the House of Commons, June 8, 1891.)

Let us recall Macdonald's famous unity quote: "Let us be English or let us be French . . . and above all let us be Canadians."

Macdonald played a leading role in promoting Confederation, to the point of making alliance with his staunch political rival and Opposition leader, George Brown. With his wide-ranging personal vision and constitutional expertise, Macdonald drafted the British North America Act, which defined the federal system by which the five provinces were united on July 1, 1867.

Macdonald was appointed prime minister of Canada and won the federal election the following month. In his first administration, his primary purpose was to build a nation. Communications between the provinces were essential and, to this end, Macdonald began the Intercolonial Railway. It would run from Halifax to the Pacific Coast and include Canada's two new provinces of Manitoba and British Columbia, and the Northwest Territories.

Under Macdonald's leadership, Canada achieved a certain degree of autonomy from Britain in foreign affairs. He also brought in a system of tariffs to protect Canadian products from foreign imports, especially those from the United States, in order to boost economic growth.

We as Canadians should remember him for his accomplishments. He was the leading Father of Confederation. As Canada's first prime minister, he was responsible for securing the West, in the face of a very real

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American threat. He saw the Canadian Pacific Railroad through to its completion, against considerable opposition, and thus he created of Canada something more than a mere geographic expression. His national policy provided a framework within which a national economy would develop.

In the final analysis, he not only did more than anyone else to bring Canada into being, but he also ensured her survival through the early, difficult years. In doing so he earned, or should have earned, the title Father of Our Nation.

An 1860 speech summed up his lifelong political creed and political goals: ". . . one people, great in territory, great in resources, great in enterprise, great in credit, great in capital."

He foresaw the issue of free trade with the Americans: "As for myself, my course is clear. A British subject I was born, a British subject I will die. With my utmost effort, with my latest breath, will I oppose the veiled treason which attempts by sordid means and mercenary proffers to lure our people from their allegiance."

Macdonald's 1891 election address: "But if it should happen that we should be absorbed in the United States, the name of Canada would be literally forgotten; we should have the State of Ontario, the State of Quebec, the State of Nova Scotia and State of New Brunswick. Every one of the provinces would be a state, but where is the grand, the glorious name of Canada? All I can say is that not with me, or not by the action of my friends, or not by the action of the people of Canada, will such a disaster come upon us."

Here is what Bob Rae had to say about him recently, "I still think he was our greatest prime minister. He was a rousing stump speaker; he was rivetting in Parliament. He understood, as few people have, the relationship between our two founding peoples. He reached out to Lower Canada, now Quebec, and he made it happen. He also understood our need to remain independent beside the then-overwhelming military power of the United States, now the military, economic and political power of the United States, and he launched his National Policy.

"In other words, he understood the fabric of the country and our need to remain sovereign and independent from the United States."

Do we do enough to remember him?

No we don't. How about Washington's birthday in the United States? How about Lincoln's birthday? How about the Jefferson Memorial, the Washington Monument, or the Lincoln Memorial?

If Jan. 11 won't do it (too close to New Year's and Christmas) how about the date of his death in 1891 - June 6? We need more heroes in Canada: let's begin again with Sir John A.

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*John Turner is a former prime minister of Canada.*

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